

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Wikoff Color Corporation

South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Wikoff Color Corporation Implements Lean Initiatives

Client Profile:

Wikoff Color Corporation, founded in 1956, is a printing ink manufacturer that provides inks, varnishes, and coatings to high-quality printers worldwide. The company manufactures thousands of individual products and has about 2,000 active customers. Over the years it has grown to 32 facilities in 22 states; headquarters and research and development offices are located in Fort Mill, South Carolina. Twenty-nine of those facilities are manufacturing plants; the other three are sales and service centers. The company has 470 employees, 170 of whom are located at the Fort Mill facility.

Situation:

Wikoff Color Corporation (Wikoff) chose to locate such a large number of facilities near major customers because of a strong demand for quick supply of custom-made products on a daily--sometimes hourly--basis. The company uses a batch processing production system, which allows employees to provide better and faster service to changing customer demands for rapid fulfillment. As a downside to batch processing, normal demand fluctuations mean higher inventories and more inherent process inefficiencies because of constantly changing customer demands. Wikoff wanted to find a better way to compete, and contacted the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (SCMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

Solution:

SCMEP performed a competitiveness review (operations assessment) to identify opportunities for improvement and to recommend an implementation strategy. SCMEP recommended Wikoff engage in a focused lean manufacturing implementation effort aimed at reducing inventories and order turnaround time. SCMEP led the Wikoff team in a value stream mapping exercise geared toward pinpointing operational inefficiency, followed by comprehensive fundamental training in lean principles.

After Wikoff staff learned the basic lean principles, SCMEP and Premiere Source Lean Manufacturing Group (an SCMEP partner organization) led company management into a policy deployment initiative, a lean tool that helps in the achievement of profitability through the coordination of all entities. With guidance from SCMEP, Wikoff managers reviewed the company's three- to five-year plan to ensure all departments and individuals worked toward company-set goals. With SCMEP's help, Wikoff started planning at the corporate level and at the bulk

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manufacturing plant in Fort Mill. Since the process was a true transfer of knowledge initiative, Wikoff is now able to deploy the same principles at its other 31 locations by teaching those plant managers what kinds of tasks will enable the company to reach its long-term goals.

Results:

Reduced inventory by \$750,000, or approximately one-third.

Reduced payroll by 15 percent through natural attrition and no layoffs, without impacting output.

Avoided costs associated with building a planned addition to the facility.

Testimonial:

“Our highest impacts [from our South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership project] so far have been in Fort Mill because it has one year of maturity over the other facilities and is by far our largest facility.”

Phil Lambert, President